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FEATURES

Get Back on Balance

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Mary is an Ivy League graduate, with top honors in accounting. She recently became a certified public accountant and landed a job in one of the city's top accounting firms. She prepared herself for a future as a partner in the firm. Married to her college sweetheart, Mary believes all of her hopes and dreams are coming true.

Ted is her talented attorney-husband, who also has hit his career stride and is counting the days until he becomes a full partner. Both of them want a family and a house. Perfection is something they both seek, and they both believe with hard work, patience and diligence, everything is possible. Sounds wonderful, doesn't it?

Unfortunately, reality has hit Mary and Tom hard. They work long hours and barely have time to eat together, much less time to talk about their hopes and dreams for the future. Mary feels pressure to meet deadlines at work and is finding her hours only increase as the work keeps piling up. She arrives home tired and irritable, avoiding the chores that await her. Tom also has deadlines and feels pressure to be a top performer at work. He is expected to bring in new business and take care of existing accounts. After a long day at work, he arrives home to find Mary as irritable and overwhelmed as he is. Instead of sharing their thoughts and trying to relax with each other, they are both preoccupied with their chaotic schedules. Does this situation sound familiar?

Mary and Ted know they must find some kind of resolution before their marriage and livelihoods are compromised by the stress they feel. Mary, a great multitasker, has started looking into different kinds of resources they might benefit from. Her friends tell her it is time to get some help around the house and not feel guilty about it. Ted takes Mary's lead and starts asking friends and colleagues about social activities he and Mary can share together.

Finally! The situation is on its way to being resolved. Both Ted and Mary are finding ways to juggle their work and home responsibilities. What can you do to improve your own life circus?

Here are some of tips you can implement to find more peace and less chaos in your schedule:

1) Take care of you. Are you being accountable for your own care? Not just physical, but mental and emotional health are important, too. When was the last time you saw your doctor, got a haircut or went to the gym? Create a list and start making a change for the better. Join a local fitness club, get involved with community service, find a church or social organization to build relationships. Eat right, exercise, reduce your stress levels and find time to socialize and renew old friendships. Take up new hobbies or renew your interest in old ones. You can even go online and connect!

2) Outsource your household responsibilities. You can start off by calling a cleaning service! After all, hiring someone to help with chores and cleaning could reduce your workload and give you more free time to do the stuff you actually enjoy like spending time with family and friends. Many companies offer different kinds of support personnel to do chores like dusting, mopping, cleaning, laundry and even some light shopping. You can even hire someone on a weekly or monthly basis. Don't feel guilty about it, either! Everyone needs extra help at one point or another.

3) Hire someone for your outside chores. Mowing the grass, cleaning up the yard and doing household repairs can take up a lot of spare time, even if they're done during the weekend. If you want to spend more time with loved ones or friends, or even find time for the hobbies you once loved doing, look into a yard service or hire a neighborhood kid to help.

4) Review your job responsibilities. You may be spending extra time on duties that could easily be passed on to an assistant or secretary. If there isn't already a support staff in place, confer with your boss or supervisor to see if there is budget to hire someone for this kind of help. Maybe you can find a part-time intern willing to help in exchange for college credit or an hourly wage. Review your job on regular basis and assess where you want to be.

5) Work with your colleagues. When you offer to help your co-workers with their client accounts and projects, don't feel guilty about asking for their help when you need it. If you are taking on more tasks and projects than you can handle, not only can this backfire with your boss, it can negatively affect those around you, such as your colleagues and clients. Know your limits ahead of time; if there is a huge project that needs to be finished in a week, plan ahead and ask help when necessary.

6) Take a look at your remaining household responsibilities. Consult with your partner or spouse about the

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jobs you prefer doing and make a list of who does what. Ted loves the stock market and loves to invest, so he's in charge of investments and retirement funding. Mary, being an accountant, wants to see everything balanced and she will pay the bills, adjust the family budget and balance the checkbook. Talk weekly about how the plan is working and if it needs to be "tweaked," you can easily make changes as needed.

7) Make time for the important stuff. Set goals for both work and personal fulfillment, and consult with your spouse or partner. Ted and Mary are already planning on a second honeymoon in Europe. They both agree it's time to renew their vows and talk about those "hopes and dreams" again. They've even talked about their plans for a family and who will take time off from work.

Nancy D. O'Reilly, PsyD, is a clinical psychologist, researcher and founder of the online resource WomenSpeak.com, based on a decade of research. A member of the American Psychological Association with more than 25 years of experience, Dr. O'Reilly counsels clients on topics ranging from mental health and stress to relationships and careers. She is author of the forthcoming "Timeless WomenSpeak About Feeling Youthful At Any Age," and hosts a radio program, "Timeless WomenSpeak." For more information: 417-886-7061, www.womenspeak.com.

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